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ABSTRACT

During its century and a half history, baseball has been given continued impetus by the development of new technologies in communication--the telegraph, the sports page, the radio and television. Perhaps the most important in the initial spread of baseball throughout America was the railroad. The completion of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1869 made possible a western tour by the Cincinnati Red Stockings, during which games were played in St. Louis, San Francisco, Sacramento, and Omaha. The impact of the tour is debatable--it did create a heightened fervor for the sport in the short run, but the overwhelming superiority of the Red Stockings may have slowed the development of baseball competition on the west coast, where sailing, horseracing, billiards, footracing, velocipede riding, and cricket claimed much larger followings. The tour's most prolonged impact may have been in Carson City and Virginia City, Nevada. A baseball rivalry had already grown between these two mining communities and was intensified by the impending arrival of the Red Stockings, invited to play by the Carson City team. However, the Red Stockings traveled straight through to Omaha, and the Carson City team, frustrated but with enthusiasm undampened, was left to continue its local rivalry with Virginia City. (MB)

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OF RAILS AND RED STOCKINGS: A VIGNETTE ON THE EXTENSION OF BASEBALL TO THE AMERICAN WEST

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Jacques Barzun, noted scholar and critic, once remarked: "Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball" (Wallop, p. 22)*. Emerging from the embryonic fetus of organized sport in America the game of baseball has beguiled the nation's citizenry into a long and passionate love affair of almost unrivaled dimension, and has gained a distinction of having generated more in the way of public attitude towards a national sport ethic than has any other singular sporting activity.

During its almost century and a half history baseball has been fortunate in having been given fresh impetus in its various stages of development by such significant communication innovations as the telegraph, the sports page, the radio, and, of late, television. All have had dramatic consequences on baseball's popularity throughout America. However, the most crucial technological development in the initial spread of baseball to the nooks and crannies of America was one of transportation impact, or, more definitively, the railroad. It can be argued that baseball development in many ways became an adopted foster child of the railroad, following the trestled pathways across the country like a child lured by the Pied Piper's flute.

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As might be imagined the railroad was crucial relative to the first episodes involving the extension of baseball to the American West, particularly as the "twin ribbons of steel" related to the endeavours of the 1869 Cincinnati Red Stockings and their efforts to present the latest concepts of the game to more "primitive" baseball brethren. History reports that the 1869 Red Stockings played 70 games,* winning 69 and tying one (Stern , pp. 36-37); that they travelled the length and breadth of America, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, from the Great Lakes down the Mississippi River Valley as far south as Louisville; and, even more importantly, that they imbibed all with whom they came in contact, with an admiration and infatuation for baseball -- an infatuation that here in more contemporary times continues to envelope the sporting interest of North Americans.

What history has failed to report, however, are those events which embraced the extension of baseball to Western America, an extension which through the years has had immeasureable impact on the history of the game. The record indicates that the Cincinnati Red Stockings of 1869 played five games in San Francisco in late September and early October, but otherwise, is silent in its portrayal of the Club's other western activities. The following is a profile of those happenings depicting the storied Red Stockings' crusade through the West in the late summer and early autumn of 1869, set against a backdrop featuring the activities of neophyte baseball

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* The author has increased the accepted 1869 Red Stocking record by one game, a heretofore unreported contest played in Sacramento, California on October 5, 1869.

clubs organized in the California cities of San Francisco and Sacramento and the pulsating, rambunctious Nevada mining communities known as Virginia City and Carson City. Part and parcel of the Red Stocking tapestry were the developments of America's post-Civil War Period, the most important of which was the railroad, that trestled highway of destiny that made the final fabric possible.

The nation had scarcely recovered from the joyous telegraphic message from Promontory Point, Utah on May 10, 1869: "The last rail is laid . . . the last spike driven . . . . The Pacific Railroad is completed" (Hafen and Rister, p. 525) when America's first all-professional baseball club completed plans for baseball's first transcontinental "road trip," an event which served as the catalyst for making baseball "the coming thing" in western America. Throughout the spring and summer of 1869, the Red Stockings had coursed through the east and midwest disposing of one opponent after the other in a startling display of their overwhelming superiority. Only a tied contest with the Haymakers of Troy, New York blighted the otherwise perfect record (Op. Cit., p. 37). A short Red Stocking visit to St. Louis, just prior to the Club's departure for San Francisco, was marked by sound thrashings administered to two local baseball clubs, the Unions and the Empires. In those two games the Red Stockings scored 101 runs to their opponents' 18 (Ibid.), a fact which boded not well at all for their prospective Western adversaries.

On September 19, 1869 the Red Stockings departed St. Louis and began the Union Pacific/Central Pacific rail excursion that would see them cross

the great plains of the midwest, wind their way through the labyrinthe-like passes of the Rocky and Sierra Mountains, and, finally, descend the Pacific slopes to San Francisco. As San Francisco prepared itself for the much publicized visit, local newspapers dutifully informed anxious San Franciscans of the Red Stockings' "safe" departure from St. Louis (San Francisco Chronicle, September 19, 1869). John Durker, president of the San Francisco Association of Baseball Clubs, convened representatives of the Atlantic, Pacific, Eagle, Knickerbocker, Broderick, Pastime, Phoenix, Empire, California Theater, and Oriental Baseball Clubs to finalize the hospitality arrangements for the celebrated visitors (Daily Alta California, September 22, 1869). San Francisco, determined to present a cosmopolitan image, rushed to complete the seating and playing field accommodations necessary for spectator and Red Stocking alike. A pavillion seating 1000 people was erected at the Recreation Grounds, promising comfort to ladies and their escorts in exchange for the somewhat inflated price of $1.00 per person (op. cit., September 25, 1869).

San Francisco newspapers published front page information on the exploits of the Cincinnati club, baseball's first all-professional team, calling it "the wealthiest baseball club in the country" (The Club's total 1869 payroll for its ten players was $9500). The virtues of A.B. Champion, Cincinnati Base Ball Club president, were extolled in full, and the Red Stockings' home grounds in Cincinnati, said to accommodate 5000 spectators and which purportedly cost the club $25,000 to construct were described in detail (Ibid., September 26, 1869). Not overlooked were the playing abilities

and personal eccentricities of the more publicized Red Stocking players, in particular, the Wright brothers, Harry and George, and the team's ace pitcher, Asa Brainard, described by the Chronicle as "the most active and swiftest pitcher in the country" (Ibid.).

Despite the amazing record of the Red Stockings on their 1869 early and mid-season tours of the east and mid-west, a spirit of optimism prevailed among the players of the San Francisco clubs selected to play the matches against the invaders from the east. Such optimistic feeling was countered by remarks from the local press pointing to the absurdness of a possible win by a San Francisco club: "The Red Stockings . . . will open the eyes of those who have considered themselves base-ball sharps, as they make the game so much superior to the old style. Opponents can't make an average of one run per inning" (Daily Alta California, September 23, 1869).

Three clubs were chosen to pit their expertise against the mighty Red Stockings. The Eagles were to play the first two games, followed by a two game series involving the Pacifics, and, ultimately, a final contest calling for the Atlantics to display their talents (or lack of them as it turned out). An enigma surrounding the American West's first real sport spectacle was the fact that none of the San Francisco area baseball clubs saw fit to engage in competitions with each other in preparation for confrontations with the Red Stockings. A lone cricket match between the St. George and Pioneer Cricket Clubs marked the only recorded bat and ball play preliminary to the arrival of the Red Stockings (op. cit., August 29, 1869). At times, certain aspects of local baseball play promised "humor by the

ton," such as the antics of the Fat Men's Base Ball Club, a faction whose creation was inspired by the Red Stocking visit and whose numbers were composed of nine gentlemen of San Francisco, including capitalist and second baseman Michael Reese at 275 pounds, and catcher Colonel Henry "Fat Boy" Fritz at 310 pounds (Ibid., September 29, 1869). These two rotund specimens were overshadowed, however, by the club's shortstop, Harbor policeman H. Kentzel, who tipped the scales at 330 pounds (Ibid.).

The first Red Stocking-Eagle match was played on Saturday, September 25, 1869 before a full and appreciative crowd which overflowed the pavillion and strung itself along the top of the fence barriers (Ibid., September 26, 1869). The contest, won by the Cincinnatis, 35 to 4, provoked comments from newspaper reporters varying from appreciation to technical scrutiny. The Chronicle reported: "It is easy to see why they adopted the Red Stocking style of dress which shows their calves in all their magnitude and rotundity. Everyone of them has a large and well turned leg and everyone of them knows how to use it"(Ibid.). The Daily Alta California reporter, on the other hand, chose to report on the major differences between the playing techniques demonstrated by the two clubs. In a front page article on the game, Brainard's striding pitching delivery was analyzed in depth and was stated to be "much more effective than the fixed stance delivery of the Eagle pitcher" (Daily Alta California, September 26, 1869). Then too, the Red Stockings' "manner of escaping from first to second as the pitcher draws back his arm is most imperative . . . Eagles dilly dallied around their first until too late" (Ibid.).

Despite the lesson learned, the subsequent efforts of San Francisco ball clubs to "give the Cincinnatis a contest" proved woefully short. On September 27th the Eagles were once again beaten soundly, this time by a 58 to 4 count (San Francisco Chronicle, September 28, 1869). They were successful, however, in "skunking" (whitewashing) the Red Stockings in the second inning (Ibid.). Admission charges for the second contest were decreased to 50 cents, which included carfare (horsedrawn) to the playing grounds (Daily Alta California, September 27, 1869).

To demonstrate the athletic versatility of their club members, the Red Stockings next engaged in a cricket match with the California First Eleven, earning a 118 to 39 victory in a two inning affair (Ibid., September 29, 1869).

On September 29th, 31st and October 1st the Red Stockings closed out their San Francisco competitions with 66-4 and 54-5 wins against the Pacifics and a 76 to 5 five inning victory over the Atlantics in the final game, a contest during which 400 people witnessed 14 Red Stocking homeruns (San Francisco, September 30, October 1, October 2, 1869). Perhaps by chance, but more probably reflecting the growing feeling of disparity between San Francisco ball clubs and "the Red Tide," the Chronicle published the results of the final game at the end of a daily feature entitled: "Suicides Yesterday."

The series of games played in San Francisco, although producing no real competition for the Red Stockings (they had scored 289 runs to their opponents' 22) did develop another sporting dimension on which Californians might fasten their attention. Prior to 1869 such pursuits as sailing regattas, horseracing, billiards, footracing, velocipede riding, and cricket claimed the larger

proportion of exercise and spectator interest among the city's sporting enthusiasts. Baseball, in time, would eclipse all those as well as other pretenders to the claim of being the city's most popular sports attraction.

Good will gestures on the part of the Red Stockings and their hosts heightened as the visit drew to a close. On October 4th, the Red Stockings' last day in San Francisco, the team mixed its members with those of several of the local clubs. A seven inning game between factions led by Harry Wright and Asa Brainard ended San Francisco's baseball activity for 1869 on a note of goodwill (Ibid., October 5, 1869). The hospitality shown by San Franciscans to their guests was consistent and was culminated by a gala civic banquet on the evening prior to the Red Stockings' departure. Toast followed toast, wishing the Cincinnatis well, but none was responded to with more enthusiasm than that of Harry Kunce, who expressed the wish on behalf of all San Franciscans that they (the Red Stockings): "May never meet the wash in which they may be bleached" (Ibid.). After a musical introduction of "Hail to the Chief," President Champion spoke final words of thanks and outlined future plans for America's first all-professional team. Further contests were to be played against other Western clubs located in communities along the return route home to Cincinnati. Invitations had been received from Sacramento, Virginia City, Carson City, Nebraska City and Omaha. Two prospective season-culminating events, as outlined by Champion to an enthralled San Francisco audience, never did materialize -- a trip to New Orleans to play the Lone Star Base Ball Club and an excursion to Brooklyn, New York to contest against old rival Eckford Club for the "Championship of America" (Ibid.).

On the early morning of October 5th, 1869 the Red Stockings took leave of fair San Francisco, travelling on the Central Pacific to Sacramento, where they arrived in time to play a late afternoon game with a club dubbed the California Picked Nine, a collection of 4 Sacramentans and 5 San Franciscans. The 8 inning contest, played at Agricultural Park before 500 enthusiastic viewers, resulted in a 46 to 14 Red Stocking win, prompting the Daily Union to to state: "The Red Stockings exhibited a degree of skill in throwing and catching that astonished many of the spectators and certainly convinced everybody that they are justly entitled to the fame which they now enjoy. Why, in the first inning they made 15 runs in 15 minutes" (Sacramento Daily Union, October 6, 1869).

On October 8th the Red Stocking entourage took leave of their Orleans Hotel accommodation in Sacramento, once again boarded the cars of the Central Pacific, and bid farewell to Pacific Coast America. They had charmed multitudes, whetted the sporting appetite of all who paid witness to their playing prowess, and most certainly developed in California the germ of the idea that baseball offered society an important entertainment commodity. If the on-field playing expertise of the Red Stockings left few doubters, the team song, sung in saloon, salon and even more select company, left none unenraptured:

We are a band of baseball players
From Cincinnati City;
We come to toss the ball around
And sing to you our ditty;
And if you listen to the song
We are about to sing,
We'll tell you all about baseball
And make the welkin ring.
The ladies want to know
Who are those gallant men in
Stockings red, they'd like to know

History has failed to record the most prolonged impact of the Red Stockings' trip home, pointing only at the brief visit to Omaha where two games were played against the Omaha and Otoe Baseball Clubs. In each "the gallant men in Stockings red" vented three days of railroad car incarceration on the hapless opponents by scores of 65 to 1 and 56 to 3 (Stern , p. 37). Of far larger impact was a game the Red Stockings never played.

There seems to be little doubt that the West's most feverish baseball activity during 1869 occurred in the thriving gold mining centers of Carson City and Virginia City, Nevada. When word was first received on the telegraph that the all-professional Red Stockings were to journey West to play a series of games in San Francisco, the opportunity for "a piece of the action" was simply not to be ignored by gambling crazed and entertainment-starved members of Nevada's two best known communities. Baseball clubs in Virginia City and in neighbouring Carson City materialized as rapidly as did those more-often-than-not wretched creatures seeking the earth's riches.

The first baseball organization in Virginia City was called the Silver Star Baseball Club. That club, formulated in mid-September 1869 had such a large following that a first as well as a second nine was organized, a most appetizing inducement for intrasquad games. The Virginia City experience prompted nearby Carson City to follow suit. A sporting rivalry between two cities of such similar character was natural. On September 21st, as the Red Stockings journeyed westward towards San Francisco, the Carson Daily Appeal announced home-and-home matches between the Silver Star and Carson Clubs. On the very day that the Red Stockings opened in San Francisco with the Eagles,

the Carson Club met and defeated Virginia City Silver Star Club, 82 to 31 (Ibid., September 26, 1869). The contest, played on the Plaza Grounds in Carson City, produced 11 homeruns (7 by Carson Club and 4 by Silver Star Club) and resulted in 10 fly balls being caught (5 by each side). The day was concluded by a festive dinner party at the Ormsby House, hosted by the Carsonites for their Virginia City guests. Two days later the Carson Club telegraphed a challenge to the Red Stockings, the contest to be played in Carson City's public square (Ibid., September 28, 1869).

Meanwhile, reports of the annihilation of San Francisco ball teams by the Red Stockings reached Nevadans. Press reports marvelled at the innovative techniques employed by the Cincinnatis, including the use of substitute runners for lame strikers (Ibid., October 1, 1869). On October 8th Virginia City citizens noted the Red Stocking departure from Sacramento and turned out to the ball grounds to prepare the field for an expected Red Stocking visit, their expectations exhorted by a report in the San Francisco Chronicle stating that America's premier baseball team was heading for Virginia City (Territorial Enterprise, October 8, 1869). Virginia City, unlike rival Carson City, had never issued an invitation or challenge to the Cincinnati Club. This fact was unfortunate for the early history of baseball in the West. A Virginia City contest would have been much more palatable to the Red Stockings than a game in Carson City, from whom they had indeed received an official invitation. The Central Pacific line bisected Virginia City while a visit to Carson City would have necessitated a lengthy and uncomfortable overland wagon ride, a most distressing prospect for "city

slickered" easterners of Cincinnati vintage.* Upon learning that the Red Stockings were "heading for Virginia City," the press of neighbouring Carson City rallied public support for its regional baseball brethren and issued dire warnings to the Red Stockings: "They (The Red Stockings) have made no calculations with regard to rarified air** and are probably destined to a still more awful defeat than they received at the hands of the Eagles, Pacifics and Picked Nines of San Francisco and Sacramento (op. cit., October 8, 1869). Apparently, the Carson Daily Appeal's recollection as to which aggregations had been the superior in California baseball play was liquidated in the face of an imminent Red Stocking visit to the area.

But, alas, the Red Stockings paused not a moment in Virginia City, nor at any of their prognosticated stops on their way east, except for Omaha. Frustrated, but certainly not daunted from continuing the latest fad, the second game of the Virginia City-Carson City series was hastily organized for October 9th. The Territorial Enterprise reported that the outcome "on our own dunghill" should be different, what with new players coming out for the team and much work having been accomplished on the playing field (op. cit., October 9, 1860). On the day of the game the Virginia City Ball club rode out to greet their opponents as they arrived in wagons at Gold Hill, a small community not far from the city. Personally escorted into the city and treated to a sumptuous breakfast at Delmonicos, the Carsonites unobligingly responded

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* Seven of the Cincinnati players were from eastern seacoast cities, the other three from Cincinnati and Indianapolis.

** The reference to "rarified air" concerned the atmospheric conditions surrounding the Virginia City ball grounds, located as they were next to the city's gas works.

by again taking the measure of the Virginia City boys. The Carson press reported: "We received a dispatch yesterday from Theodore Hale who went up to Virginia City to witness the match game of ball as follows: 'Carson Club victorious 54 to 17.' Just as we predicted. How about that rarified air Brother Lynch?* Guess it ain't the Carson boys that can play baseball! Oh no! Bring on your Red Stockings and your Eagles and your Haymakers (Troy, N.Y.), if you think they can take any tricks here" (op. cit., October 10, 1869). The Territorial Enterprise, disappointed at the outcome, mourned: "Again the Virginians have met the enemy and became his'n" (op. cit., October 10, 1869).

Despite the Red Stocking shun of Nevada ball play, interest in the game broadened. On October 13th the Territorial Enterprise reported the result of the Red Stockings' first game in Omaha while at the same time announcing that a new ball team called the Nevada Base Ball Club, composed of boys aged 16 to 20, was being organized and "will probably be in condition to challenge the famous Red Stockings after a week's practice" (Ibid., October 13, 1869). Three days later, the Northwestern Base Ball Club was organized and all members requested to meet at the grounds for practice . . . "a full and prompt attendance is desired" (Ibid., October 16, 1869). Carson City ball players received due warning from their city's press: "Keep our muscle up in case the Red Stockings come this way again" (Carson Daily Appeal, October 17, 1869). Virginia City's Territorial Enterprise reported: "It is quite

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* Editor of the Gold Hill News and outspoken supporter of Virginia City baseball.

certain that baseball is all the rage just now. Old and young have baseball on the (base of the) brain. Sandlotters make it very warm for the windows in the vicinity" (op. cit., October 17, 1869). Likewise, Carson City's Daily Appeal mirrored the public's fixation for baseball: "The rage for baseball is very apparent hereabout. Old fellows whose hair and teeth are going and gone, and young ones who have just got their first breeches and boots on are knocking, and tossing and catching balls on the plaza and the streets from daybreak to dark. The disease is as contagious catching as butterfingers are at a discount" (op. cit., October 31, 1869).

In late November, as cold winds blew down from the nearby Sierra Mountains and snow began to "fly," the season's last match was announced. Members of the Virginia City and Northwestern Clubs dedicatedly prepared themselves for a November 23rd contest: "Members of both clubs enjoy good health -- a fact that restaurants and boarding houses can fully sustain -- have been sober more or less, and practiced constantly at home" (op. cit., November 23, 1869). The final confrontation had to be postponed due to "too much snow a flying," but a week later, on November 30th, with members of the Silver Star Club in attendance as spectator guests, the Virginia City men defeated the Northwesterners by a score of 52 to 19" (Ibid., December 1, 1869).

And so ended the first chapter of organized baseball in the American west. There would be many more -- with names like Lefty O'Doul, Willie Mays, Sandy Koufax, [illegible] replacing the likes of Harry and George Wright, Asa Brainard, McVey, etc. In retrospect, one must ponder the final impact of the Red Stockings'

venture west. Did the fact that the Red Stockings were so demonstratedly superior to their California opponents serve to stymie or discourage further baseball activity after their departure from the state in the autumn of 1869? Or, was the newness of baseball simply subservient to other forms of sporting activity, of which there was plenty? Was baseball activity in Nevada sustained during the final months of 1869 as a result of "the game that never was," a contest which, in all eventuality, might have had the same effect on continued Nevadan play as it had on such activity among baseball brethren further to the west? Or, were competing sporting entities far less apparent in the more "primitive" society of Nevada than in San Francisco and Sacramento, thus leaving the newness of baseball less vulnerable to the competition of other sport and entertainment forms.

Whatever might be judged as the "final impact"; one wonders how the cocky Nevadans might have fared against Cincinnati's unconquerable 1869 Red Stockings. Certainly Virginia City and Carson City self confidence never diminished for a moment. Indeed, one can almost picture the work-roughened frontier lout, peering at his pitcher from behind home-plate, enveloped at times by the whistling dust of the sandswept ball-grounds, or the target of winter's early snowflakes, or even immersed in "rarified air," boisterously proclaiming to all within earshot what the fate of "those eastern Redmen" would have been had they chosen to dally in old Virginia City:

Why lick those lobsters, sure we can!
Any time of year.
Look here! We'll show you how it's done.
Hi Cully! Put 'er here!*

* Anonymous

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